

▶ NASHUA

Nashua

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Event marks demise of city eyesore

■ Officials, neighbors gather at site of former asbestos company for tree-planting ceremony.

By GRACE F. MURPHY
Telegraph Staff

NASHUA - The dust blowing over festivities at the former Johns-Manville plant Monday morning was welcomed by the dignitaries who attended and the residents of the surrounding neighborhood.

Those in attendance knew that less than a year ago dust from the site included asbestos fibers that came loose as the building at the corner of Bridge and Sanders streets deteriorated. Monday's dust came from clean topsoil being spread over 3 acres where the plant used to stand.

In place of the plant lies a patch of grass, a new maple tree and several feet of topsoil being used to level the site.

"There was no single issue in my district that was more serious, more troublesome, that I thought about more than this," said U.S. Rep. Charlie Bass, R-N.H.

From 1900 to 1985, the buildings at 40 Bridge and 10 Sanders streets served as a manufacturing plant for asbestos products.

The plant was condemned by the city in 1994 and named a health hazard by the state in 1995 should it collapse or catch on fire. Inhalation of airborne asbestos particles has been linked to lung cancer and lung disease.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stepped in, cleaning up the most immediate hazards first and eventually demolishing both buildings. Last September, EPA Re-

Tree

■ From Page 8

gional Administrator John DeVillars said grass would be growing on the spot by the time July came.

On Monday, DeVillars, neighbors and federal, state and local officials gathered by the new tree to celebrate the demolition.

Bonnie St. Pierre, president of a neighborhood task force concerned about the plant, said she felt like the day would never come that the plant would be gone.

"I feel like we've been given a large gift. The benefit is obvious for health reasons, but also for the appearance of the neighborhood," she said.

The Nashua River is on the east side of the site. Within a one-mile radius are 13 schools, a hospital, 13 elderly and low-income housing developments and closely spaced apartment houses.

St. Pierre said she isn't aware of any specific plans for land at the moment, but she said she would like to see a stable use for it eventually.

Task force member Gene Harrington, whose Nashua Farmer's Exchange store abuts the former plant, said he would prefer to see the land stay grassy for a while.

"I expect it should be developed, turned into an industrial type of site, but I'd like to see part of the site used for community gardens for people in the neighborhood," he said.

Setting aside part of the land for gardens would keep residents interested in their neighborhood, he said.

The importance of teamwork was

emphasized by all of the speakers Monday.

Mayor Donald Davidson thanked Deputy Fire Chief Michael Buxton and Fire Marshal Ken Renoux for their diligence and the federal delegation for working with the EPA and getting the money to demolish the plant.

"The money we've put to this project doesn't grow on trees. It's appropriated by the federal government," he said.

The agency first spent about \$660,000 to remove 132 cubic yards of asbestos and 60, 55-gallon drums of hazardous chemicals from the buildings. The price included \$68,000 for a report estimating how much it would cost to tear down the two buildings.

The agency then spent \$650,000 to remove a smaller building at 10 Sanders St. and remove dust collection system pipes that collapsed when the roof caved in at 40 Bridge St. the winter of 1995.

In September 1996, the EPA gave an additional \$2.5 million, which was enough to fully clear the site for redevelopment. The city contributed almost \$14 million to the project by allowing the agency to dispose of asbestos debris in Four Hills Landfill with no charge, Davidson said.

Bass thanked Davidson and former Mayor Rob Wagner for keeping his office informed of the project and building's condition.

Also speaking at the ceremony were U.S. Sen. Bob Smith, R-N.H., a representative from the office of U.S. Sen. Judd Gregg, R-N.H., Dennis Pinski from the state Office of Health Management and Phillip O'Brien, director of waste management for the state Department of Environmental Services.

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